

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director-Comptroller

SUBJECT : Overclassification and Declassification
of Information

1. This memorandum is for your information only.
2. Pursuant to your request for a review of our current posture on the problems of overclassification and declassification, I have asked the Intra-Agency Security Committee to hold meetings and address itself to these two problems. They have reviewed them against a backdrop of growing Congressional interest in this area.
3. On the problem of overclassification, the Committee has developed a draft of a proposed Notice which includes definitions of the Defense classification categories and suggested guidelines on the classification of information. The thought is that such an unclassified Notice would serve as a ready reference for the Classification Officers of the Agency. However, in view of the apparent imminence of the issuance of a revised Executive Order we are now considering a more general Notice on the subject of overclassification which can be augmented immediately after the issuance of the Order with such specific provisions as are appropriate.
4. Executive Order 10501, as amended, upon which our regulations are based, prescribes the following policies and procedures for the declassification of classified material:

Section 4. "When classified information or material no longer requires its present level

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of protection in the defense interest, it shall be downgraded or declassified in order to protect the effectiveness and integrity of the classification system and to eliminate classifications of information or material which no longer require classification protection. Heads of departments or agencies originating classified material or information shall designate persons to be responsible for continuing review of such classified information or material on a document-by-document, category, project, program, or other systematic basis, for the purpose of declassifying or downgrading whenever national defense considerations permit and for receiving requests for such review from all sources."

STATINTL

Our Agency Regulation [REDACTED] provides that "Classified information or material shall be reviewed on a continuing basis for the purpose of determining the current appropriateness of the classification assigned with a view to declassification or reclassification where appropriate."

5. In the years immediately following the promulgation of Executive Order 10501 (1953) there was a formal program of classification review. It resulted from the necessity to upgrade or declassify all RESTRICTED material because that classification was eliminated. This change caused a review resulting in the downgrading of a substantial body of documents. The program functioned within the classification control network, established by the Agency as the result of Executive Order 10501. Reclassification bulletins were issued regularly by the CIA Classification Control Officer in the Office of Central Reference (OCR). There was little interest in the reclassification bulletins or in the master reclassification files maintained in OCR. By the early 1960s, the reclassification process, costly in terms of manpower, was constrained to the point of virtual disappearance. The Central Reference Service (formerly OCR) continues to disseminate and file the few reclassification notices received from other agencies. The Central Top Secret Control activity continues to issue semiannual notices of

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TOP SECRET documents which have been downgraded. About 100 CIA TS documents were downgraded in 1971. The Classification Control Network remains active, functioning largely for the handling of internal classification questions or problems and responding to ad hoc requests both internal and external for the downgrading of specific CIA documents.

6. In effect CIA has not had a program of "continuing review for downgrading purposes" for many years probably because of the Director's statutory responsibility for the protection of intelligence sources and methods and the continuing use by the Agency of productive sources for extended periods of time. [REDACTED] states "All classified information or material originated by CIA is considered of an intelligence nature within the definition of Group 1 above and is excluded from automatic downgrading or declassification."

STATINTL

7. The Agency thus generally limits its downgrading and declassification efforts to a program of responding to specific requests. However, the Agency has recently undertaken a project to declassify the [REDACTED] publication, "Trends in Communist Propaganda" and earlier titles in the series for the years 1947 to 1966. In addition, Agency offices have frequently expended many man-hours in sanitizing classified documents in order to permit their contents to be disseminated in an unclassified form.

STATSPEC

8. The Intra-Agency Security Committee has reviewed our current regulations on declassification and downgrading of information. It has concluded that these regulations are adequate in light of the provisions of the existing Executive Order 10501. As noted above, however, a minimum of assets have been expended on this effort in the past years. In view of the apparent imminence of the issuance of a revision of Executive Order 10501, it is the opinion of the Committee that no new directives on declassification and downgrading need be issued at this time. The Committee has agreed that priority attention should be given to the formulation of directives on declassification and downgrading as soon as we have adequate assurance as to what the provisions of the new Executive Order will be on that subject. I concur in these conclusions.

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9. Possible questions and suggested answers for use in the event we become involved in hearings on the classification and declassification of information are currently being developed.

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for Support

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STATINTL OS/ES/EPD/ [REDACTED] sb (1 March 1972)

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